

**STATE OF CALIFORNIA
REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD
CENTRAL COAST REGION**

STAFF REPORT FOR REGULAR MEETING OF DECEMBER 10, 2021

Prepared on November 18, 2021

ITEM NUMBER: 9

SUBJECT: Racial Equity Initiative Update

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ACTION: Information/Discussion

KEY INFORMATION: This item presents a discussion of the Central Coast Water Board's efforts to advance racial equity.

SUMMARY

This staff report is intended as an update regarding our racial equity initiative actions to date and next steps leading up to the development of a Central Coast Water Board specific Racial Equity Resolution and action plan.

Background

Racial equity occurs when race can no longer be used to predict life outcomes, and outcomes for all groups are improved. Through the efforts described below, the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) and the nine Regional Water Quality Control Boards (Regional Water Boards, collectively Water Boards) are working toward a future in which race is no longer a predictor of professional outcomes for our employees and where the Water Boards' programs and policies preserve, protect, and restore California's drinking water and water resources equitably for people of all races. At the State Water Board's August 18, 2020 meeting, the Board supported staff's proposal to implement a racial equity initiative that strives to: 1) establish a foundation of internal and external engagement that values listening and collaboration to drive actions in support of racial equity, 2) draft a resolution on racial equity to be considered for adoption by the State Water Board and leveraged by the Regional Water Boards to adopt their own resolutions, and 3) develop racial equity strategies and action plans to drive our efforts for the coming years. The Water Boards' statewide Racial Equity Initiative is in alignment with the Central Coast Water Board's historical actions focused on environmental justice and engaging with underrepresented communities¹. Our staff

¹ Underrepresented Communities include but are not limited to Disadvantaged Communities (DACs), Severely Disadvantaged Communities (SDACs), Economically Distressed Areas

are actively participating in the statewide effort, and we will be bringing our own racial equity resolution to the Central Coast Water Board for consideration in 2022. Since 2019, we've implemented actions supporting improved workforce diversity and awareness of racial equity issues and have recently convened an internal Racial Equity Working Group to help inform and guide our internal and external actions in alignment with the statewide effort.

STATEWIDE EFFORTS AND ACTIONS

Immediate Action Plan

As part of the Water Boards' participation in the CalEPA "Beyond Green" Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) Team to advance racial equity in policy and program development, planning, and decision-making, in December 2019 the State Water Board issued an Immediate Action Plan for Advancing Workforce Diversity to its divisions and the Regional Water Boards. This Immediate Action Plan established a set of hiring practices to promote workforce diversity and realize the benefits of a diversity-aware workforce while a more holistic plan is developed. We began implementing this plan in early 2020 by: 1) requiring our management team to take implicit bias training to help inform more equitable hiring processes, 2) including diversity statements in our job advertisements highlighting our commitment to workforce diversity, 3) including model diversity questions as part of our interview process to gauge prospective hire awareness of racial equity issues and associated skills, and 4) implementing broader recruitment efforts targeting more universities with an emphasis on science and engineering multicultural organizations and clubs throughout the state. These efforts have already resulted in increased staff diversity with the recent hiring of more culturally diverse, high-caliber candidates.

Statewide Racial Equity Survey

In April and May 2020, The Water Boards implemented a voluntary online employee racial equity survey. The Executive Officer encouraged Central Coast Water Board staff participation in the survey, resulting in a 69.6% (51 staff) participation rate for our regional workforce. A total of approximately 987 Water Board staff participated in the survey. The purpose of the survey was to evaluate staff's: 1) understanding of racial equity, 2) knowledge of the organization's policies and practices to advance racial equity, 3) awareness of divisional, regional and organizational plans to advance racial equity, and 4) knowledge and perceptions of the Water Boards' efforts to engage the broader community, including its communities of color, and community partnerships to advance racial equity. Overall, the survey results indicated a willingness and capacity by Water Board employees to engage in racial equity work. A majority of the survey respondents indicated that they found it valuable to examine and discuss the impacts of race, felt comfortable talking about race, and possessed a basic understanding of concepts related to racial equity. These results provide a positive outlook on the potential for meaningful racial equity engagement and action across the Water Boards.

(EDAs), Tribes, Environmentally Disadvantaged Communities (EnvDACs), and members of Fringe Communities.

Statewide Racial Equity Steering Committee and Working Group

In August 2020, the State Water Board initiated a Racial Equity Steering Committee and Working Group (collectively Racial Equity Team) to develop a robust and inclusive [Racial Equity Initiative](#)² that aims to ensure Water Board programs and policies preserve, protect, and restore California's drinking water and water resources equitably for people of all races, and to create a workplace that is equitable, diverse (i.e., representative of the communities we serve), and inclusive, where all employees feel that they are equally contributing to our mission and are valued members of the organization.

The Racial Equity Steering Committee is comprised of eight high level Water Board employees whose focus is to ensure that Water Board leadership remains committed to advancing racial equity and to direct the working group's progress on implementing internal and external engagement and preparing a draft Racial Equity Resolution to be considered for adoption by the State Water Board.

The Racial Equity Working Group is comprised of approximately twenty-two Water Board employees representing a variety of backgrounds, roles, and levels of the organization. The Working Group's responsibility is to carry out actions to advance racial equity within our organization and with the communities we serve through the Water Board's programs, policies, and processes. Section Manager Angela Schroeter is the Central Coast Water Board's representative on the Racial Equity Working Group. Since their inception, the Racial Equity Team has convened biweekly joint meetings, including a racial equity retreat, to continue to improve coordination and maximize effectiveness.

As discussed below the Racial Equity Team has been instrumental in implementing internal and external engagement activities and the development of a Racial Equity Resolution for State Water Board consideration. In addition, the Racial Equity Team has maintained the Water Board's Racial Equity intranet³ and internet sites, developed internal communication tools and training, including an anonymous comment box, and conducted monthly support lunches to discuss racial equity issues. Following adoption of the Racial Equity Resolution, the Racial Equity Team will work with stakeholders to develop racial equity strategies and action plans to drive the Water Boards efforts for the coming years.

Internal and External Engagement

The Racial Equity Team initiated statewide activities including the implementation of four public listening sessions between November 30 and December 3, 2020, to gather comments and feedback to help inform the development of a resolution and initial action plan. Board Member Dr. Hunter provided introductory remarks for one of the listening sessions. Over the four-day period, 86 members of the public, including high school and college students, agricultural workers, and other community activists, participated in the

² https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/racial_equity/

³ <https://waternet.waterboards.ca.gov/exec/racialequity/>

listening sessions and nine small breakout sessions to discuss five topic areas: 1) water in your community, 2) public participation and decision making, 3) improving accessibility and data sharing, 4) funding, and 5) workforce and capacity building. Collectively, participants provided comments, perspectives, and recommendations reflecting the concerns of urban and rural water users and water users in underrepresented communities, including majority-Black, indigenous, Latinx, and Asian communities throughout California. A report summarizing the public listening sessions is available via the following link:

https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/racial_equity/docs/racialequity_externalsessions_summary_final.pdf

In March 2021, the Water Boards held a series of internal listening sessions – nine in total to accommodate staff. In addition to informing the resolution, the purpose of the listening sessions was to start the conversation with Water Board staff about their experiences, perspectives, and hopes on what a truly equitable and inclusive workplace looks like, and what actions we can take to make it a reality. Nearly 400 employees, about 20% of the Water Board workforce, took part in the internal listening sessions. The management team encouraged and supported Central Coast Water Board staff participation in the internal listening sessions to share their experiences and perspectives, and to hear those of others. A total of 44 Central Coast Water Board staff (over 50% of our regional workforce – the highest percentage of staff among all Regional Water Boards) participated in the listening sessions, representing a little over 12% of the total participating Water Board workforce. Feedback suggested the Water Boards has generally fostered an inclusive space that allows for training and engagement opportunities under the umbrella of equity and diversity. Areas of needed improvement include diversity within the workforce and communication with external partners, particularly underrepresented communities.

On June 3, 2021, the State Water Board conducted a Racial Equity Initiative webinar for Water Board staff to daylight and discuss: 1) insights from the racial equity public and employee listening sessions, 2) results of the employee racial equity survey, and 3) the goals of the draft Racial Equity Resolution and how staff can provide feedback.

On October 22, 2021, the Water Boards' Water Quality Coordination Committee (WQCC; annual public meeting of the State and Regional Water Board members) held a "Racial Equity in Action" panel discussion consisting of federal, state and local leaders to inform and engage with board members about various ongoing racial equity efforts.

State Water Board Racial Equity Resolution

The Racial Equity Team was charged with the mid-term goal of bringing a Racial Equity Resolution to the State Water Board for consideration and adoption. The above noted public listening sessions, internal listening sessions, employee survey and webinar were used to inform the development of the State Water Board Racial Equity Resolution. The Racial Equity Team completed and released a [Draft State Water Board Resolution](#)⁴ for

⁴ https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/racial_equity/resolution.html

public comment on June 24, 2021, and the State Water Board held a public workshop on July 7, 2021 to receive oral comment. In response to comments received during the July 7 workshop, the deadline to submit written comments was extended to August 2 to allow more time for the public and staff to provide feedback. A [Revised Draft State Water Board Resolution](#)⁵ and [supporting information](#)⁶ were released on November 5, 2021. On November 16, 2021, the State Water Board unanimously adopted the [final Racial Equity Resolution](#).⁷

The adopted Racial Equity Resolution acknowledges, in part, the existence of systemic racism across American institutions, race as a predictor of access to resources, disproportionate distribution of adverse environmental impacts based on race and disproportionate allocations of funding and services based on race. The resolution affirms the Water Board's commitment to making racial equity, diversity, inclusion, and environmental justice central to our work, and explicitly condemns acts of racism, xenophobia, bigotry, and institutional and systemic racism that exist. There are three primary goals the resolution aims to achieve. First, to condemn racism, xenophobia, white supremacy, bigotry, racial injustice, and race-based violence and hate. Second, to eliminate inequitable distribution of resources and services based on race. Third, to strengthen the Water Boards' commitment to:

- Equity across all Water Boards programs and services,
- Uphold an anti-racist workplace and develop policies that will lead to a racially equitable and diverse workforce,
- Evaluate and remediate Water Boards systems, practices, policies, and cultures that created and continue to perpetuate racial inequities and environmental injustices,
- Identify and implement actions to dismantle and remediate inequities within the organization and throughout its work,
- Provide equitable access to safe, clean, affordable drinking water and other beneficial uses of water; affordable services to support sanitation, wastewater collection, treatment, and reuse; and healthy watersheds.

The resolution also directs the State Water Board's Executive Office to develop and implement a Racial Equity Action Plan. Additionally, the resolution also directs the State Water Board to create a proposal by January 2022 to establish an Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion to achieve a workplace, workforce, and work outcomes that reflect racial equity.

OTHER REGIONAL WATER BOARD EFFORTS

⁵ https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/board_info/agendas/2021/nov/111621_5_drftreso.docx

⁶ https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/racial_equity/docs/Racial-Equity-Resolution-Annotated-References-2021.11.pdf

⁷ https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/board_decisions/adopted_orders/resolutions/2021/rs2021-0050.pdf

The other regions are considering or have initiated various actions towards advancing the Water Boards' Racial Equity Initiative. Although we are in general alignment with our partner regions, each region is taking a slightly different approach. Consistent with the Central Coast Region, most regions have been anticipating the State Water Board's adoption of a Racial Equity Resolution before considering a regional resolution, whereas; others have applied or will apply the Racial Equity Initiative as part of various strategic planning documents. The following table summarizes the actions of the other regions.

Region	Summary of Racial Equity Activities
Region 1	In Summer 2021, North Coast Region staff in collaboration with the State Water Board Office of Information Management and Analysis, hosted a series of racial equity information and discussion sessions. In addition, in the summer of 2021 North Coast Region staff initiated a self-education discussion group that meets approximately monthly to discuss various racial equity and environmental justice-related media, including books, movies, TED talks, and podcasts. This Racial Equity Self Education Workgroup was recently tasked with reviewing the State Water Board's Racial Equity Resolution and considering modifications for incorporation into a draft regional Racial Equity Resolution, which following listening sessions and public review, is tentatively scheduled for consideration by the Regional Water Board in the Summer or Fall of 2022.
Region 2	From April to September 2021, San Francisco Bay Regional Water Board staff implemented several actions to advance Racial Equity/Justice including: Implicit Bias Awareness Training for the management team, all-staff discussion and several small group listening sessions on racial equity, diversity and inclusion, and an all-staff training on racial equity and environmental justice. The San Francisco Bay Region has also appointed an Equity Advisory Team to advise and consult the staff, Executive Management Team and the Board members on actions and approaches to advance racial equity and environmental justice in Water Board conduct, policies, programs, and projects, both internally and externally.
Region 3	See discussion below.
Region 4	In January 2021, the Los Angeles Regional Water Board held a Symposium and Board Discussion on "Advancing Racial Equity and Environmental Justice in the Los Angeles Region" . The symposium included elected officials, community and government leaders, academics, and the public. As follow up to the symposium, Los Angeles Regional Water Board Chair Yee and Vice Chair Guzman developed a Draft 2021 Racial Equity and Environmental Justice Workplan for the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board. Permitting programs are increasing community outreach and communication, using CalEnviroScreen to prioritize activities and are including new permit findings to advance racial equity. The region

	has also implemented all staff trainings on implicit bias, racial equity and data tools (e.g., CalEnviroScreen).
Region 5	The Central Valley Regional Water Board Strategic Plan (October 2021) incorporates the principles and practices of racial equity to be proactive in the promotion of civility, inclusion, and staff diversity; ensure internal and external feedback loops are established across all levels of the organization to encourage feedback regarding the Board's practices and program effectiveness. The Central Valley Regional Water Board has dedicated four staff to participate in the Racial Equity Working Group.
Region 6	The Lahontan Regional Water Board is currently developing new management and tribal coordination leadership within the organization while in the planning stages for tribal focused engagement in the spring of 2022, followed by resolution development later in the year.
Region 7	The Colorado River Regional Water Board is monitoring the State Water Board resolution development process and seeking resources to support a similar regional effort. The region is also taking steps to increase workforce diversity through its staff recruitment efforts and supporting staff participation in statewide diversity efforts.
Region 8	Racial Equity is included in the Santa Ana Regional Water Board's priorities for 2021. The previous Executive Officer, Hope Smythe, was an active member of the Racial Equity Steering Committee prior to her retirement. Santa Ana Regional Board staff have initiated internal racial equity trainings.
Region 9	<p>In September 2021, the San Diego Regional Water Board adopted a strategic plan, the Practical Vision, which specifically identifies priorities and actions for racial equity, environmental justice, and Tribal Nations in two chapters:</p> <p>4. Implement Racial Equity and Environmental Justice Measures - Work towards equity in environmental protection and provide enhanced engagement with underserved communities during the Board's decision-making process.</p> <p>5. Partner and Consult with Tribal Nations – Work in consultation with Tribes to designate waterbodies in the San Diego Region for the Culture, Tribal Subsistence, and Subsistence Beneficial Uses and restore and protect water quality for the benefit of present and future generations of Indigenous Americans.</p> <p>The San Diego Water Board is dedicated to implementing racial equity and environmental justice measures and providing enhanced engagement with underserved communities and over 25 Tribal Bands during the Board's decision-making process. In September 2020, Executive Officer Dave Gibson participated in the 4th Annual "Environmental Leadership Summit:</p>

	Environmental Activism & The Intersection of Racial, Social, and Economic Justice.” Regional Board staff have initiated internal discussion groups and recruitment and retention efforts focused in improving the representation of staff.
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CENTRAL COAST WATER BOARD ACTIONS

Environmental Justice Commitment History

Starting around 2010, the Central Coast Water Board made it a priority to identify and engage with underrepresented communities as part of our regulatory actions to be aware of and address environmental justice issues, particularly as it relates to impairment of groundwater drinking water beneficial uses. In 2012, staff and Board Member Hunter participated in the Governor’s Drinking Water Stakeholder Group to develop recommendations to address communities’, with an emphasis on disadvantaged communities’, challenges in dealing with nitrate contamination of drinking water supplies in the Tulare Lake Basin and Salinas Valley. Between 2014 and 2017, the Central Coast Water Board organized a series of environmental justice tours to engage directly with underrepresented communities and learn more about how they are affected by water quality impairments, especially impacted sources of drinking water. On January 26, 2017, the Central Coast Water Board approved Resolution No. R3-2017-0004, *Adopting the Human Right to Water as a Core Value and Directing Its Implementation in Central Coast Water Board Programs and Activities*, which adopts the human right to water consistent with human right to water stated in California Water Code section 106.3, subdivision (a) as a core value and affirms the realization of the human right to water and protecting human health as the Central Coast Water Board’s top priorities. In 2018, we initiated a free domestic well testing program and a coordinated environmental justice capacity building grant to support disadvantaged community focused outreach and implementation of the well testing program using settlement funds. Staff have used the results of the well testing program to inform the implementation of replacement water strategies in coordination with county level drinking water and public health programs, the State Water Board Divisions of Drinking Water and Financial Assistance and our environmental justice partners, including the Community Water Center.

Staff currently consider the human right to water, environmental justice, and underrepresented communities when prioritizing and implementing programmatic actions and when developing agenda items to inform outreach planning and how our actions may support or hinder environmental justice issues. These efforts are codified in standard sections and findings within staff reports and permits. Moving forward we will be applying a racial equity component to these efforts.

Initial Actions

Consistent with the Water Boards’ Racial Equity Initiative, we are broadening our environmental justice perspective, language, and actions to include racial equity components. With the support and encouragement of the management team since early 2020, staff have prioritized racial equity by attending trainings, attending listening

sessions, and identifying opportunities to integrate racial equity into the Water Board's policies, programs, and practices. In the past three years, the Water Board has held five racial equity and implicit bias training courses. Approximately 75% of all Central Coast Water Board staff, including 100% of supervisors, have attended at least one racial equity training course.

While State Board was in the process of developing its Racial Equity Resolution, we began our own internal dialogue about racial equity and how we can best demonstrate our commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and environmental justice. As an important element of our organizational culture and since racial equity affects all our work and workforce, we recently convened a staff level working group as discussed further below to help lead the discussion, planning and implementation of our next steps, including the development of our own Central Coast Water Board Racial Equity Resolution. It's a bottom-up approach intended to facilitate broad staff input, engagement and commitment on the development and implementation of our Central Coast focused racial equity initiative.

Central Coast Racial Equity Working Group

In late July and August 2021, our management team solicited staff interest to participate in a regional Racial Equity Working Group and approved them to participate based on reasonable time commitment expectations in balance with managing their programmatic work. As a condition of their participation in the working group, staff that hadn't done so already needed to complete advanced racial equity training available during the last week of August. The Central Coast Water Board Racial Equity Working Group is an opportunity to increase employee engagement and empower staff to lead our regionally focused Racial Equity Initiative. The working group had its first meeting on September 9, 2021 and meets biweekly. It is made up of twelve staff, including James Bishop, Kimberly Chandler, Julia Dyer, Lauren Gordon, Kathleen Hicks, Rachel Hohn, Katie McNeill, Angela Schroeter, Jacqueline Tkac, Sarah Treadwell, Kathy Truong, and Arwen Wyatt-Mair. The working group spent its first couple meetings developing a governance structure and goals. The primary goals of the working group are to 1) conduct internal engagement to identify and prioritize opportunities to integrate racial equity into our programs and practices, and 2) develop a draft region-specific Racial Equity Resolution to present to the Board and public in 2022. Kathy Truong, the Chair of the Central Coast Water Board Racial Equity Working Group presented these goals at an all staff meeting on November 16, 2021. The working group is in the initial stages of developing the internal engagement plan that will be used to help inform the development of the draft resolution and initial implementation action items.

Next Steps

It is customary for Central Coast Water Board staff to provide an annual environmental justice update to the Water Board during a public meeting sometime after the first of the year. At the February 17-18, 2022 board meeting, the Central Coast Water Board Racial Equity Working Group is planning on presenting an agenda item focused on racial equity. The tentative plan for the agenda item is to have a speaker panel consisting of the following:

1. Statewide perspective – Representative from CalEPA to discuss CalEPA's commitment to racial equity and present the agency's Plan of Action for Racial Equity.
2. Regional/Local perspective – Representative from an academic, community or local government organization to discuss environmental inequity in the Central Coast Region.
3. Central Coast Water Board perspective – Representative(s) of the Central Coast Water Board Racial Equity Working Group to discuss the results of internal engagement and present a draft Central Coast Racial Equity Resolution.

It is anticipated that a draft Central Coast Water Board Racial Equity Resolution will be released for written public comment prior to the February 17-18, 2022 meeting and oral public comment will be received during the meeting along with Water Board direction on the development of a proposed resolution for consideration during a follow-up meeting. The extent to which the Central Coast resolution will mirror the State Water Board resolution will be based in part on results of the working group's internal engagement, region-specific racial equity issues, public comment and feedback received from the Central Coast Water Board and stakeholders during this and subsequent meetings.

The February 2022 meeting racial equity item may also include updates regarding regional environmental justice efforts, such as the Central Coast Drinking Water Well Testing Program, Community Water Center, Central Coast Region Integrated Regional Water Management Disadvantaged Community Involvement Grant, Central Coast Climate Justice Network, and Salinas Basin Agriculture Stewardship Group.

CONCLUSIONS

Central Coast Water Board staff are committed to furthering environmental justice and racial equity as part of our ongoing activities to implement our water quality mission in coordination with our statewide Water Board counterparts, environmental justice partners, and the community members and regulated entities we serve. We are in general alignment with our partner Regional Water Boards in moving this initiative forward through various actions even though each region is taking a slightly different regionally specific approach including the use of strategic planning documents to codify its commitment instead of developing a region-specific resolution. Staff will be developing a Central Coast specific Racial Equity Resolution for public comment and Board consideration next year and is targeting the February 17-18, 2022 public meeting for a robust racial equity discussion and to consider a draft resolution prior to developing a proposed resolution. The resolution development and adoption process along with identifying initial implementation actions is the relatively easy first step in our Central Coast Water Board Racial Equity Initiative process. Ongoing implementation will require a stepwise iterative and transparent approach in response to both challenges and opportunities until racial equity is effectively integrated as part of our water quality mission and organizational culture.

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